

U.S. Military Academy - Ordnance Compound Office
(NCO Quarters, Benet Hall)
East of the intersection of Ruger and Howard Roads,
west of Building No. 637
U.S. Military Academy
West Point
Orange County
New York

HABS No. NY-5708-11

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY - ORDNANCE COMPOUND OFFICE
(NCO QUARTERS, BENET HALL)

LOCATION: East of the intersection of Ruger and Howard Roads, west of Building No. 637 (HABS No. NY-5708-9), U.S. Military Academy, West Point, Orange County, New York.

USGS, West Point Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: 18.587010.4582920.

PRESENT OWNER
AND OCCUPANT: U.S. Military Academy, Department of the Army.

PRESENT USE: Cadet Activity Club.

SIGNIFICANCE: The Ordnance Compound is the earliest Gothic Revival structure at West Point and is considered to be one of three buildings from the 1830s-40s which became stylistic prototypes for subsequent designs, most notably those by Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1840. A discrepancy exists over the date of erection, between 1838 and 1840. Williams's Facilities Report and drawings at the National Archives give the date as 1840. Robert Lange in "An Overview" states that the Compound was completed in 1840.
2. Architect: Tradition holds that Major Richard Delafield designed the Ordnance Compound. There is little evidence to substantiate or deny this attribution although Lange states that construction on the Compound might have been started before Delafield arrived at the Academy. Drawings at the U.S. Military Academy Special Collections, which are dated 1838-39, give credit to Delafield. Perhaps the strongest evidence in Delafield's favor is the similarity in style and construction to the Library (now demolished) and the Cadet Barracks (Central Barracks HABS No. NY-5708-8), which he designed in 1841 and 1851 respectively. See Lange's "Overview" for a discussion of the Library and the Cadet Barracks.
3. Original and subsequent owners: U.S. Military Academy, Department of the Army.
4. Builder: Unknown.
5. Original plans and construction: The exterior of the Ordnance Compound Office appears to have been little changed since its construction. It

is not known what the original interior was like and subsequent changes have removed all parts of the original finish.

Boynton's History of West Point, 1863, states that "The Ordnance and Artillery Laboratory on the north side of the Plain, was erected in 1840, and consists of three two-story stone buildings, used for fabrication of ammunition, repairing, etc., all within a stone-enclosed yard, containing, besides shelter for Field Batteries" (Boynton, p. 261).

6. Alterations and additions: One of the few exterior alterations was the conversion of a window into a door on the facade. Prior to 1939 a doorway existed in the far south bay of the facade, corresponding to a doorway in Building 671 (HABS No. NY-5708-10). This bay changed to a window in 1964 when the doorway was shifted one bay to the right. This four light window now has a red concrete sill with patched granite below.

The most significant changes, however, involve the windows, which were changed from double quarrel light casements to double-hung wood sash (probably at the same time as Building 671, between 1871 and 1879).

Wrought iron grilles similar to the ones on Building 637 (HABS No. NY-5708-9) and 671 were removed (prior to 1871) from all first floor windows outside of the Compound courtyard.

Interior changes have been numerous and have completely altered the building from its original appearance. Prior to 1939 the first floor consisted of two large rooms, a toilet and a foyer into the stairhall; the second floor was one large room, one small room and a toilet. In 1939 the building was altered into a non-commissioned officers barracks by the addition of partition walls creating on the first floor: a toilet, cook's room, day room, hallway, and one N.C.O. room; on the second floor partitions created four N.C.O. rooms, a toilet and a hallway.

In 1947 the building was converted into two N.C.O. quarters, one on each floor. It was probably at this time that the chimney on the south side was added.

Minor alterations occurred in 1952 and 1958 but in 1964 the building underwent a major rehabilitation. This included creating a large one-room lounge on the first floor; a new restroom on the first floor; a new staircase; a new entry vestibule; new exterior doors; new windows and window casings; the relocation of a door and window on the facade; a plywood floor with vinyl tiles on the first floor; a suspended ceiling on the first floor; the addition of a bathroom on the second floor; and the removal of all the N.C.O. room partitions on the second floor, creating one large panelled wainscot lounge room.

Parts of the building were altered after 1964, most notably the second floor where the walls were stripped down to exposed stone with brick relieving arches above the windows.

B. Historical Context:

"The Board of Visitors' Report of 1826 recommended that a gun house be erected to protect artillery pieces from exposure to the weather. Subsequently, the Board of Visitors' Report for 1833 stated that a gun house, a laboratory, and a magazine should provide shelter for Ordnance equipment and Ordnance stores. This resulted in the building of the present compound wall and the three original buildings comprising the Ordnance and Artillery Laboratory in 1837. Unfortunately, records are not available that indicate the cost of these buildings, but it is believed that the Act of Congress for the support of the Military Academy approved 2 March 1837 for appropriation of \$8,000.00 was expended for the construction of this laboratory.

"The Guide Book to West Point in July 1844 states, 'The plan and arrangement of this structure is such as to excite our curiosity. The Towers are designed for the storage of various kinds of Ordnance.' During the early years of the compound, the compound yard with its Revolutionary trophies was the predecessor to the Ordnance Museum founded in 1854 and today known as the West Point Museum.

"Later, the Ordnance and Artillery Laboratory was known as the Ordnance Compound. This took place after the subject of Ordnance was transferred from the Instructor of Artillery to the Instructor of Ordnance and Gunnery on 27 February 1857. Ordnance as a subject, was taught in the Compound from 1837 to 1913 when the Department of Ordnance and Science of Gunnery moved to the newly built East Academic Building. The Ordnance Detachment lived in the barracks within the Compound from 1837 to 1947, when the detachment moved to another location. Upon the movement of the Ordnance troops from the Compound, the flank buildings were converted into apartments for enlisted men and the main building and the little building were used as a photographic laboratory." ("Historical Background on the First Class Compound," Dedication of Benet Hall leaflet, 11 October 1964, U.S. Military Academy Archives.)

The Department of Ordnance and Gunnery was an essential part of a cadet's training in the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth century. The history of both the department and its courses was described in the Annual Report of 1897, which is reproduced and found in the Supplemental Material section of HABS No. NY-5708-9.

A description of the Ordnance Lab from the 1902 Annual Report outlines its functions at that time. "The routine work at the laboratory by the ordnance detachment includes the care and preservation of all the service and obsolete ordnance, trophy guns, etc., at the post, the preparation of ammunition and blank cartridges for cadet practice and drill, the manufacture of fireworks, and such repairs and other work connected with guns, carriages, small arms, ammunition, and ordnance supplies generally as may be necessary in the practical instruction of cadets in their various duties." In the twentieth century the ordnance department lost much of its early significance and its original buildings were gradually converted for other uses. In 1961 the Ordnance Compound buildings were dedicated as the First Class Club in honor of three former instructors: Brigadier General Stephen Vincent Benet, USMA 1849, Major General William Crozier, USMA 1876, and Colonel James G. Benton, USMA 1842 (see Supplemental Material).

For the historical context of the Ordnance Compound within the overall development of the Academy see HABS No. NY-5708, Volume 2: "West Point:

An Overview of the History and Physical Development of the United States Military Academy."

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Ordnance Compound Office is a simple, utilitarian example of American Gothic Revival in the Tudor Style. Its materials and details associate it with two contemporary buildings at the Academy in addition to the other buildings of the Ordnance Compound.
2. Condition of fabric: The building is in good condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The Ordnance Office, like its counterpart on the opposite side of the compound, is a two story rectangular building with a projecting three side elevation on the north. The four bay, 50' long facade faces east into the courtyard; the west elevation is also four bays. Two and three bays make up the 24' south and north elevations respectively.
2. Foundations: Foundation walls cannot be seen above grade but it can be assumed that they are the same granite as the principal walls.
3. Walls: The 2' thick walls are rock-faced granite laid in a random range ashlar pattern. The same brown and gray granite was used for the other contemporary parts of the Compound and for the Cadet Barracks (HABS No. NY-5708-8). The old Library is said to have had the same granite as well. Granite is used for the walls and lintels while a reddish-brown sandstone (?) is used for the label molds, window sills and the projecting cornice.
4. Structural systems, framing: The building has load-bearing stone walls, wooden joists and a wood rafter roof.
5. Chimneys: Chimneys consist of two low brick stacks on the roof near the north wall, with what appears to be metal chimney pots, and a single brick stack on the roof near the south wall (later than the other two).
6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The building's only two entrances are located on the facade. The principal double doors date from 1964. The doors have twelve fixed lights each. Above them is a transom space now filled with wood. This doorway has a large sandstone lintel turned down at the ends to resemble the window label molds. A later concrete sill and stoop were added at a later date.

The doorway just to the left of the double doorway was created from a window in 1964 at the same time the far left bay was changed from its original doorway function to a window. The label molds of both these bays are identical to all the other windows. This single door has twelve fixed lights.

- b. Windows: All of the windows are 6-over-6 double-hung sash. There are six windows on the facade, six on the north, eight on the west and four on the south. All of the windows have wire screens. With the exception of one concrete sill on an east and west window, all windows have sandstone sills.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The hip roof is covered with slate and has two scuttles on its east slope.
- b. Cornice: The coved sandstone cornice is similar to those used on the other contemporary buildings of the compound. Between the cornice and the roof a wooden fascia, divided vertically with wood blocks, acts like a frieze, albeit one above the cornice. Above this fascia a metal hung gutter runs along the edge of the roof to downspouts at the corners.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans: The first floor is largely taken up by a lounge room which is entered through either of two vestibules. The north door's vestibule is also the stair hall for the southeast corner staircase. The southwest corner of the first floor is taken up with a restroom. The second floor consists of a small stair hall separating a restroom and a bathroom on the southern end of the building and a lounge room which occupies most of the floor.
- 2. Stairways: A quarter-turn wooden staircase with an intermediate landing is situated in the southeast corner and connects the first and second floors.
- 3. Flooring: The first floor has a vinyl tile covering on plywood over the original floor boards on wooden joists.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: With the exception of the exposed stone walls of the second floor, the walls are plaster and the ceilings hung.
- 5. Openings: All doors and windows are replacements and are not notable. The exposed stone walls of the second floor reveal brick relieving arches above each window opening.
- 6. Decorative features and trim: There are no original or later decorative features which survive.
- 7. Hardware: There is no surviving original hardware.
- 8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating, ventilation: Heating is by steam radiators fed by the central heating mains. Scuttles have been added to the east and west sides of the roof for ventilation.
 - b. Lighting: No original lighting fixtures remain. Two electric lamps have been added to the facade.

c. Plumbing: There are no systems of interest.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The Ordnance Compound is on a hill and faces north, downhill, towards the Hudson River. The Ordnance Office is situated on the northwest corner of the Compound and faces east toward its contemporary counterpart (HABS No. NY-5708-10) and the Barracks (HABS No. NY-5708-9). To the southeast is the Blacksmith/Carpenter Shop (HABS No. NY-5708-14). See sketch plan of the Ordnance Compound. The Compound's perimeter stone wall adjoins the building on its south and east sides; the building actually sits outside of the Compound, forming part of its enclosure. Howard Road passes just north and west of the building. Across the road to the north is the Ticket Office (U.S.M.A. No. 639) by Paul P. Cret (originally the Applied Instruction Building). West of the building is the Confectionary (HABS No. NY-5708-19) and the Enlisted Men's Quarters (HABS No. NY-5708-16). The Compound as a whole is west of the January 1943 Monument, the principal U.S.M.A. flagpole and the Battle Monument. This area is west of what was historically known as Execution Hollow and is on the northwest edge of the Academic Area zone identified in Lange's "Historical Overview."

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural Drawings: Original drawings are in the U.S. Military Academy Special Collection and at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. (Record Group 77, Drawer 32, Sheets 18 and 19, Records of the Office of the Chief Engineer, Cartographic and Architectural Branch). Subsequent alteration drawings are in the Facilities Engineer's Office, Directorate of Engineering and Housing, U.S. Military Academy.
- B. Early Views: Early photographs can be found in the U.S. Military Academy Archives and Special Collections. Some of these are reproduced in the Grashof and Lange volumes of this project.
- C. Bibliography:
 1. Primary and unpublished sources: Records, U.S. Military Academy Archives and Special Collections. See bibliographic essay in the Lange volume of this project for a listing of record groups.
 2. Secondary and published sources:

Annual Reports, U.S. Military Academy.

Boynton, Edward C. History of West Point And Its Military Importance During the American Revolution And the Origin And Progress of the United States Military Academy. New York: Van Nostrand, 1863.

Grashof, Bethanie C. "Building Analysis and Preservation Guidelines for Category I and Selected Category II Buildings at the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York," Historic American Buildings Survey, 1983. HABS No. NY-5708.

"Historical Background on the First Class Compound." Dedication of Benet Hall leaflet, 11 October 1964. U.S. Military Academy Archives.

Lange, Robie S. "West Point: An Overview of the History and Physical Development of the United States Military Academy," Historic American Buildings Survey, 1983. HABS No. NY-5708.

"West Point Dedicates Three Buildings For Former Instructors," Assembly, Summer 1961, 20. p. 47.

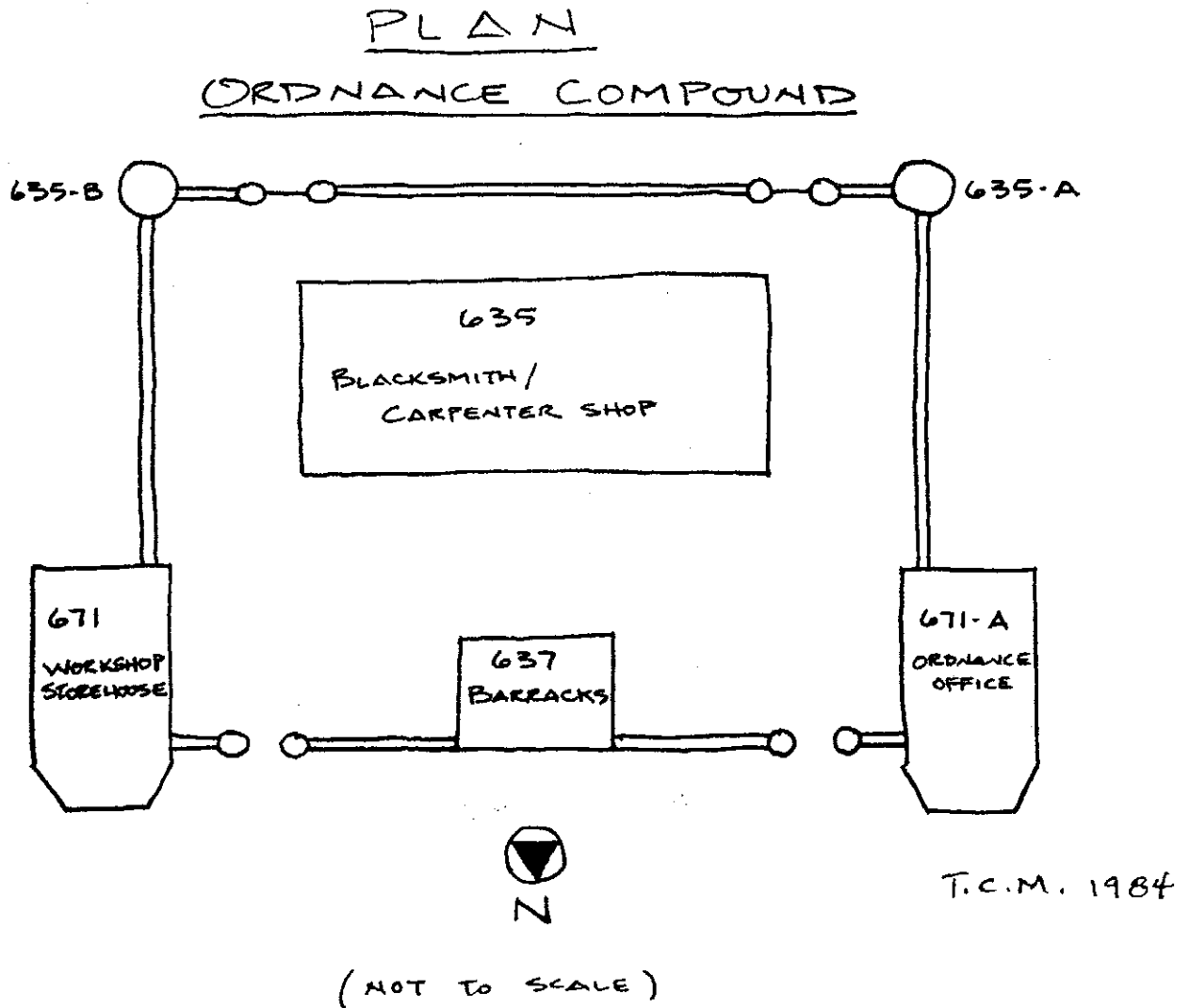
D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: National Archives, Washington, D.C.

E. Supplemental Material:

1. Sketch plan of Ordnance Compound.
2. Assembly article, 1961.

E. Supplemental Material

1. Sketch Plan of Ordnance Compound.



E. Supplemental Material

2. "West Point Dedicates Three Buildings For Former Instructors,"
Assembly, Summer 1961, 20, p. 47.

The buildings, previously unnamed, are part of what is known as the Ordnance Compound, which for 90 years was used for instruction and housing by the Academy's Department of Ordnance. The compound lies west of Trophy Point where the hill begins its descent to the Hudson River.

During their first 20 years, the buildings housed the then Department of Artillery. When the Department of Ordnance was founded in 1857, they were used for instruction buildings by that department. Then, from 1913-1947 they served as living quarters for members of the Ordnance Detachment. In 1947, they became apartments for non-commissioned officers.

Attending the dedication ceremonies were Lieutenant General John H. Hinrichs, the present Army Chief of Ordnance; Brigadier General (ret.) Earl MacFarland, former Professor and Head of the Ordnance Department here, and later Assistant Chief of Army Ordnance; Mrs. James J. Walsh, the widow of the Ordnance Association's founder; and Brigadier General (ret.) Chauncey L. Fenton, honorary chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Association of Graduates.

Three buildings constructed in 1837, as a group the second oldest still standing at West Point, were dedicated 25 May in honor of three Military Academy graduates who had been instructors at the Academy during the 19th century.

The buildings were named Benton, Benet and Crozier Halls, for the following men:

-Captain James G. Benton, Class of 1842, the first instructor and head of the then Department of Ordnance and Science of Gunnery at the Academy.

-Major General Stephen V. Benet, class of 1847, the second head of the department. He later served 17 years as Army Chief of Ordnance. Gen. Benet was the uncle of the poet who bore the same name.

-Major General William Crozier, class of 1876, who was a mathematics instructor at West Point and later became Army Chief of Ordnance, also holding the position for 17 years.

The old halls have been converted into an Activity Center for First Classmen and their guests.

Situated close to scenic Trophy Point, the nineteenth century structures provide a physical link with heritage and the West Point past.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This documentation is part of a multi-year project sponsored by the National Park Service and the United States Military Academy, explained in the United States Military Academy, HABS No. NY-5708, Volume 1, "Methodology." This written documentation was prepared by Travis C. McDonald, Jr., architectural historian, in 1982-1985 based on fieldwork conducted in 1982.